

Practical ways to celebrate Advent in the home

1. Create a seasonal silence--watch a minimum of TV, listen to quiet music; sit outside or take a walk on a clear night and watch the stars.
2. Decorate cookies with stars instead of Santa Claus.
3. Leave the Christmas tree bare except for white lights until Christmas Eve or the last week before Christmas. Hang the stockings up on Christmas Eve, too. Then leave decorations up for the 12 days of Christmas.
4. Tie a purple ribbon around the wreath on the door; change it to red and gold on Christmas eve.
5. Set out the empty crèche and add figures each week until the holy family appears on Christmas Eve or set the figures far across the room and move them gradually toward the manger, arriving on Christmas Eve.
6. Light the Advent wreath at dinner on Sunday nights and read prayers and short scripture appropriate for that week. (See the lectionary for each Sunday's readings.) Children can take turns lighting the candles and reading.
7. Use your Advent calendar in a new way--if you have one with pockets from which a child draws an ornament or piece of candy everyday, add to each pocket a note listing a deed of preparation for the day--write a letter to a grandparent, keep a promise, find the Christmas story in the Bible, take cookies to someone, pray for a joyful Christmas, invite someone to a Christmas meal, etc.
8. Listen to music that underscores the season:
 - Bach's Contata 140 (which contains the hymn, Sleepers Awake
 - the Magnificat
 - Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring
 - The Messiah--use new selections of it each week
9. Get the family involved in acts of compassion--buying, making, or wrapping gifts for needy children, baking cookies for shut-ins, sending cards to lonely persons, putting money in the Salvation Army coffers, packing or delivering foods for the hungry.
10. "Adopt" someone for Advent--do something for them each week (visit, take cookies, sing songs for them, write them a letter, invite them to a meal).
11. Grow paperwhite narcissus bulbs--they need about 4 weeks to grow, so start them in a bowl of water and pebbles on Advent 1 and keep the water level steady. Tell the children about how the bulbs grow roots; compare them to the "Shoot of Jesse" and our own growing during times when we have to wait.
12. Get in touch with the spirituality of Mary:
 - Ask your own parents about their waiting for your birth--what were their hopes and fears?
 - Imagine that you are pregnant with God for these four weeks; keep a prayer diary of what that experience is like--what do you need to do to nourish that growth, what do you need to eliminate from your spiritual diet, what preparations would you need to make in your spiritual house to hold Him and care for Him when Christmas comes?
 - Read *On the Day You Were Born* to the children and compare it to the Christmas story.

- Tell the children stories of when you were waiting for their birth and connect those stories with the spirituality of Mary.
13. The world around us has moved into a time of waiting. What are you waiting for in your life? What are those you love waiting for? What is the world waiting for? Pray for these longings and ask for guidance in preparing for them.
 14. Save and put away or give away most of the baked goods. During the 12 days of Christmas, eat and enjoy!
 15. Use your VCR for Advent, too. Find a copy of *The Nativity* (a Hanna-Barbera animation), *Cosmic Christmas* (three visitors from outer space search for the meaning of Christmas), or *Spinner's Christmas Gift* (the story of a spider who gives of himself).
 16. Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Celebrate the heritage of Jesus as the "stump of Jesse" by looking at Bible figures who preceded him. Hang symbols for these people on a Jesse tree--a bare branch decorated with symbols of Biblical heroes. Talk about your own family origins--who were your forebears and how did they "pass God on" to later generations, including you? Who else has been a "spiritual forebear" for you, family or not?

Resources for Advent

Books

What the Heart Already Knows. Phyllis Tickle

Living with Apocalypse: Spiritual Resources for Social Compassion. Tilden Edwards, Ed. Harper & Row, 1984

Awaiting the Child. Isabel Anders. Meditations for each day in Advent --written by an expectant mother and priest's wife as she waited for the birth of her child.

The Irrational Season. Madeleine L'Engle. Third book in Crosswick Journal series. Begins and ends in Advent. Exploration of her life as wife, mother, grandmother, professional woman. Includes some of her poetry.

Music

These have themes that match those of Advent or a spareness that matches the tone of the season.

Handel's Messiah
 John Rutter's *Magnificat*
 Bach's *Contata 140*
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring
December, George Winston, Windham Hill Records.
Noel, Joan Baez.
Winter Reveries, Farr Horizons